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ABSTRACT

Reflecting the renewed interest in a variety of plans to increase parent and citizen participation in education, this paper divides the questions surrounding this issue into the following four categories: co-production (partnership), decision making, citizen advocacy, and parent choice. Under each of these categories the paper considers such issues as (1) the power parents should have about school policies and practicies, (2) the power citizens should have about school policies and practices, (3) the ways in which these powers should be exercised, (4) ways parents and citizens can address their grievances and concerns about the schools, (4) the choice parents should have about what kinds of schools their children will attend, and (5) ways public schools can achieve legitimacy in the eyes of parents and the tax-paying public. While addressing these issues, the paper identifies a few examples or models of parent involvement in the schools, discusses some of the issues surrounding these models, offers recommendations for action by parents and practitioners, and provides a list of references. (HOD)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE 1980'S: PROPOSALS, ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE 1980's:

PROPOSALS, ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES, by Don Davies

The current upsurge of interest across the country in school reform is bringing renewed interest in a variety of plans to increase parent and citizen participation in education. Such ideas are by no means new. In fact, questions and conflict about parent and community relationships to schools began in this country when schools began. The debate changes in focus, vocabulary, and intensity according to the time, plan, and political climate, but the underlying questions remain the same.

Some of these persisting questions are:

- What power should parents have about school policies and practices?
- What power should other citizens have?
- How should these powers be exercised?
- What should be the parents' role in the education of their own children?
- How can parents and citizens address their grievances and concerns about the schools?
- How much choice should parents have about what kinds of schools their children will attend?
- How can public schools achieve legitimacy in the eyes of parents and the tax-paying public?

Most of the proposals for addressing these questions that are being put forward today can be clustered roughly into four categories, which I label as follows:

1. Co-Production (partnership)
2. Decisionmaking
3. Citizen Advocacy
4. Parent Choice

In this presentation, I will (1) describe briefly each of these clusters, (2) identify a few examples or models worth examining, (3) discuss some of the issues that the proposals suggest, (4) offer recommendations for action by parents, policymakers, and practitioners, and (5) provide a list of references.

Because of the reform "climate," there is an opportunity for parents, state and local policymakers, and school people to produce plans that will work in the 1980's and 1990's in particular states and localities and will contribute to the improvement of the quality of education for all American children, including those who are from families who are poor and lack social status and political influence -- the children most at risk in the society.

PROPOSALS FOR INCREASING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Co-Production

A number of proposals are built on the idea that the education of children should be viewed as a partnership between the school and the home, that students and parents are co-producers of education, not simply passive recipients of educational services. Co-production refers to those activities, individual and collective, in school or at home, which contribute to school efforts to instruct pupils more effectively and raise pupil achievement. Such activities include: well coordinated home tutoring programs; homework helper and homework hot line projects; frequent and specific reporting of pupil achievement by the teacher to the family with suggestions as to how classroom efforts can be reinforced at home; parent education designed to make parents more knowledgeable about what the schools are trying to do; home visitor programs to provide special help and to advise low-income and immigrant families; and parent volunteers assisting teachers in the classroom, and in preparing instructional materials. Most such activities involve initiative by teachers and principals and coordination by the school.

Advocates see co-production or partnership as a way to organize resources

both inside and outside public school systems to achieve higher levels of learning. The concept places responsibility for learning on students, parents, and the broader community as well as on teachers and school specialists (Seeley, 1983; Davies, 1980).

One example of a co-production plan in action is in the Selah, Washington, Public Schools, and is described in the Citizen's Notebook for Effective Schools (Zerchykov, 1984).

> The Selah Family-Centered Math Project was proposed in 1978 and implemented in 1979. It is a home-school partnership in which teachers and parents work together to help children in grades 1 - 5 learn mathematics through the use of learning activities at home. Source books are supplied for both teachers and the parents to explain program goals and give directions for math games and activities to create learning time at home. Each activity focuses on a particular skill. Parents and teachers meet regularly to discuss the child's progress. Learning objectives are developed by both parents and teachers.
>
> In January 1983, the Family-Centered Reading Project began, inspired by the success of the math project. The program is aimed at children in grades 1 - 5, especially those who are not performing in their potential level of ability. A series of home-based activities and games have been devised for use during 15 to 20 minutes every other night. As one assistant superintendent said, "We are operating on the premise that the parent is the child's first and most important teacher." Reading aloud to children is being promoted as an important way to expose them to literature at an early age and to increase learning comprehension and vocabulary. Teachers involved in the project participate in an ongoing training process in the areas of parent involvement, use of the project's

games, and effective reading instruction.

A second example is in a large urban school district, Indianapolis, and involves a comprehensive, multi-faceted district-wide effort. "Parents In Touch" is aimed at improving the image of the public schools and public support of them, but more specifically seeks to:

- increase awareness of community about the importance of shared responsibility of parents and the school for the educational progress of the child.
- create opportunities for direct parent-teacher communication with respect to the academic progress of the child.
- provide teaching strategies and materials for parents to use.

(Zerchykov, 1984)

The program, which began with and continues to employ extensive media campaigns, is coordinated by a widely representative community advisory council. The activities include parent-teacher conferences, inservice training for all elementary teachers, printed materials for parents to work on with their children at home, a parent manual, a Dial-A-Teacher program, and a "Calendar of Activities" and a "Getting Started" activity book for students at each grade level from Kindergarten up for children to work on at home with the help of the parents. Parents are asked to set aside from 15 to 30 minutes daily to assist the child. The district invests a substantial amount of money in the effort each year, from local and Federal sources, and private foundations and corporations, to provide for central office coordination, teacher time to develop materials, salaries for teachers who work on the Dial-A-Teacher program after school and evenings (Collins, Moles and Cross, 1982).

A final example is the "Teachers Involve Parents In Schoolwork Project" (TIPS), directed by Joyce Epstein at the Johns Hopkins University. The TIPS project believes that parent involvement activities should be coordinated with school curricula, student needs, and parent capacities. Epstein sees the teacher as "the manager of the classroom, the instructional process, and all available

instructional resources, including parent assistance" (Epstein, 1985). The project has four main features: clear goals, appropriate materials, two-way communication, and follow-up activities. It is designed for use by elementary teachers, but Epstein believes it is easily adaptable by teachers in middle and secondary schools. Materials are planned to seek five different kinds of goals: remediation, maintenance and review, completion, enrichment, and general home-school communication. Prototype materials have been developed in science and math and are available for use.

Of the four proposals for increasing parent involvement, those in the co-production cluster are the least threatening to teachers and administrators and the least controversial, but they require a school district investment in money and time for the development and promotion of materials, and teacher and parent orientation and training. In addition, moving to adopt such plans requires a shift in attitudes about what education for children is, from a "delivery of services" to a "partnership" model.

Decisionmaking

Practices and proposals for parent involvement in decisionmaking cover a wide spectrum of ideas, ideologies, and mechanisms. Participation in decisionmaking can mean opportunities for the individual parent to be involved in decisions about his or her own children. Three examples of individual involvement are (1) the Federally-mandated Individual Education Plan for handicapped children, where the Federal law gives the parent the right to approve or disapprove the plan and placement for the child; (2) adaptations on the IEP to non-handicapped (especially low-income) children, often in the form of a home-school "contract." and (3) the new Federal provision known as the "Hatch Amendment" which gives parents the right to challenge activities in the schools which might be classified as "secular humanism," such as psychological testing of attitudes, or values clarification durricula. Each of these examples rests on the concept that parents have a moral and constitutional right to influence the decisions

that affect their own children's education.

Many other proposals relating to decisionmaking have to do with efforts related to planning, setting policies, assessing schools, or making decisions about budget, curriculum, personnel, or other school-related matters. The proposals and practices vary widely in the degrees of power that parents have from a token advisory role to joint decisionmaking responsibility to full responsibility for some kinds of decisions. Important examples of current proposals or actual practice include the following:

- Involvement through Parent Advisory Committees, such as those which formerly existed in the Federal Title I program or in bilingual education or those that are mandated statewide in Florida.
- Involvement in districtwide planning and advisory task forces or study groups which typically involve business and community leaders and educators as well as parents, and can focus on a wide variety of topics including school closings, budget, curriculum changes, discipline, or school goals.
- Involvement in search and selection committees for superintendents, and principals.
- Involvement in individual school policy boards (as in Salt Lake City), School Site Councils (as in California), or the School Improvement Councils in South Carolina.

Two examples of involvement in decisionmaking which include a substantial degree of potential influence for parents are in South Carolina and Massachusetts.

A comprehsnsive education reform act was passed in South Carolina which mandates School Improvement Councils for every school building in the state. The Councils are a renaming and expansion of school advisory councils. Mandated in a 1976 law, the new Councils have the responsibility of participating in the preparation of an annual school assessment report, assisting with the development

and monitoring of plans for school improvement, and helping to determine how school incentive grant award money is to be used in the school. The Councils consist of at least two parents elected by parents, two teachers elected by the faculty, and in grades 9 and above, two students elected by the students. A few other members representing community organizations can also be named by the principal. The Legislature is providing substantial funding to the University of South Carolina to provide information and training for the new Councils.

A proposed school reform law in Massachusetts also includes a provision to require School Improvement Councils for every school in the state, with direct grants of state money on a per student basis to be used for efforts that the Council determines to improve the school. The funds can be used to establish innovative academic programs, expand services to students, provide alternative education programs, support community or parent involvement programs, business education partnerships, or staff training -- activities not included in the regular budget of the school district.

Both the South Carolina and Massachusetts developments are examples of direct links between the nationwide school reform movement and efforts to increase parent involvement.

Advocates of parent involvement in decisionmaking see such involvement as based on democratic principles and linked to rebuilding the legitimacy of the schools and providing support for efforts to change programs or policies (Davies, 1981; NCCE, 1978).

Citizen Advocacy

Other kinds of parent and citizen participation of current importance can be grouped under the general heading "Advocacy." Some of the most important forms of this kind of participation are these:

- Case advocacy by organizations such as the Massachusetts Adocacy Center or the New York Advocates for Children in which the individual grievances of parents are handled through administrative and legal channels.
- Class advocacy in which parents representing special interests such as the parents of handicapped children or immigrant children organize to advance their cause by influencing public opinion decisionmakers.
- Groups that organize (usually temporary organizations) to mobilize political support or opposition on particular issues (school tax levies, school closing, sex education, "secular humanism" in the curriculum, school prayer, the teaching of evolution or "creationism").
- Citizens organizations which work to build public support for the public schools study school issues or monitor school effectiveness.

Positive examples or models will be cited to illustrate the advocacy type of parent/citizen involvement.

First, Advocates for Children of New York works on both individual cases and on issues affecting rights of poor, handicapped, or minority students. They have a staff of advocates, attorneys, and community organizers who offer counseling to individual clients; help community organizations in poor and minority neighborhoods; provide training and technical assistance to advocacy groups, agencies, and schools; initiate court cases, provide information to policymakers, and work on legislative issues at the state level (Zerchykov, 1984).

Second, Schoolwatch, Inc., in Trenton, New Jersey, is a non-profit state-wide coalition of business, civic and religious organizations that monitor implementation of state education laws. One of their principal objectives is to intensify parent involvement in the schools which they do through publications

and technical assistance and through offering a 120 hour course, "Public Policy and the Public Schools," which is a vehicle to "turn parent volunteers into well-informed educational activists." The course aims to teach parents to collect and evaluate information, to work effectively in groups, to describe and analyze issues relating to educational equity, decisionmaking, and budgeting, discipline, testing, curriculum development, and parenting. The courses are offered in school districts in different parts of the state and carry college credits through Edison State College (Zerchykov, 1984).

Third, there are 15 to 20 citywide parent/citizen educational support and monitoring groups in different cities in the country which seek to study school issues, support the public school system in the area, monitor the implementation of new programs, and to provide information and services to parents, and promote public awareness and support of public schools as an institution of importance in the society. The Philadelphia Parents Union is one such organization. Others are the Public Education Association in New York City and the Citywide Education Coalition in Boston.

A quite different example of advocacy is the PTA. The PTA, organized at the local, state, and national levels, is the oldest and by far the largest vehicle for parent involvement in the schools. PTA's typically work to support schools, raising money for local school activities, providing information and parent education, advocating increased funding, and building public awareness on issues that affect children such as drug and alcohol abuse and child abuse. PTA groups often participate in political coalitions with educational groups on legislation such as tuition tax credits or school finance reform.

Advocacy, whether for children's rights, for more funding for public schools, or for exposing school inadequacies, historically tends to increase in a time of debate and controversy about education such as the current school reform movement. Advocacy cuts across the full political spectrum and is, almost by

definition, controversial as it involves conflicting social interests and values.

Parent Choice

One of the oldest and most tangled questions about parents and schooling is how much choice parents should have to select their children's school and what government policies and mechanisms there should be to foster the making of such choices.

Parent choice proposals are conceptually different from parent participation in co-production, decisionmaking, or advocacy. In all of these modes political voice or direct influence on the content of education is to be found. In the choice cluster, parent power comes through selection -- parents vote with their feet (more accurately, with their children's feet). Advocates of choice as a form of parent power range from the far right through classical conservatives to liberal reformers.

Choice proposals take many forms in this time of school reform. Five of the most important ones are sketched briefly below.

- Tuition tax credits to provide either state or Federal (or both) tax relief to parents who choose to send their children to private schools. This is a policy favorite of the Reagan administration but also has supporters among some Democratic politicians and among many private school interests. The concept is vigorously opposed by most of the mainline education interest groups.
- Voucher proposals have re-emerged in the mid-1980's after first surfacing and then subsiding in the middle and late 1960's and early 1970's. These plans are sometimes limited to the public schools and sometimes extend to private schools as well. They sometimes are proposed for poor children only, sometimes for all children. The concept of most voucher plans is to provide

established sums of money to parents with which they pay a school of their choice for educational services.

- Open enrollment plans (as in urban Cambridge, Massachusetts, and suburban Acton-Boxborough in the same state) in which parents may choose to send their children to any school in the district as long as there is space (or in the case of Cambridge schools where such a choice promotes desegregation). Governor Rudy Perpich of Minnesota has recently proposed legislation in his state which would permit parents (beginning with the 11th and 12th grades) to enroll their children in any school in the state.
- Alternative public schools, which include separate schools or schools within schools for children or youth who are having difficulty "fitting in" the standard program, for children with special needs, or special vocational and technical high schools or vocational work-study programs.
- Magnet schools have been a part of mandatory and voluntary desegregation plans in many urban districts across the country. Some propose an expansion magnet school idea (essentially a public school voucher concept) to more school districts without reference to desegregation.

The "magnet" idea is rooted in the American tradition of maximum individual choice and is a response to parent dissatisfaction with public schools or to flight of white parents from desegregating districts. Magnet plans also encompass the idea that public schools should be far more pluralistic than they usually have been in terms of styles of teaching, curricular emphasis, and/or philosophies of education. Evans Clinchy, a parent choice advocate, points out that there is a wide range of existing magnet schools:

> ...beginning with very old-fashioned elementary and high schools -- regular academic prep schools with heavy emphasis on the traditional academic subjects, including modern and classical foreign languages, and a dress code. There are also "continuous progress" schools -- Montessori schools, developmental or "open education" schools, schools devoted to the fine and performing arts, and others specializing in foreign languages or science, technology, and computers...(Clinchy, 1985).

Two examples are offered to illustrate positive models of parent choice programs, as one promising form of parent involvement. Worcester, Massachusetts, has developed an extensive Magnet School Program, as the main feature of a voluntary desegregation plan. The plan was developed in 1981, with the participation of a Citywide Parent Advisory Council and the leadership of the Superintendent, John Durkin. Ten different kinds of "magnets" were proposed and tested in an extensive survey sent to every public school parent, a third of whom responded. Three magnet schools were established the first year and six more have been added since (out of forty elementary and middle schools in the district). One of the benefits cited by commentators on the Worcester plan is that teachers and administrators also have an opportunity to choose a school that suits their philosophy or style of work (Charpentier, 1984).

The second example is in Acton, an affluent Boston suburb. For 15 years there has been an open enrollment plan. Currently, there are four elementary schools. Based on meetings with school personnel, observations and written information on each school's philosophy, parents chose a school for their child. If after having their children attend that sch-ol they are not satisfied, they can transfer to another school within the district. The district provides free transportation to the chosen school. The four schools differ. One is an "alternative school," where students are expected to assume a great deal of

responsibility. Another school is very traditional, with a structured environment and extensive use of textbooks. The other two schools are considered "middle-of-the-road" but differ in the amount of teacher discretion, flexibility, and parent involvement.

To make the plan work, great stress is placed on evaluation and reporting to parents. Standardized test results in each school, along with attendance and enrollment figures and teacher turnover are reported regularly to parents and the general public.

ISSUES RELATED TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

There are dozens of issues which have been implied in the four clusters of parent involvement ideas which have just been described. I have selected just four of these to discuss briefly here:

1. Can parent involvement increase the already substantial advantages that middle-class parents and children have?
2. Why are schools resistant to increased parent involvement? How can the resistance be overcome?
3. Should parent involvement be mandated?
4. Can parent choice increase the already substantial advantages that middle-class parents and children have?

I will discuss each of these issues in a very sketchy and selective way, even though each deserves a full scale essay backed with full documentation, or a book or two. I will discuss each issue from my own point of view, based on my own values and beliefs and interpretation of the studies that I and others have done. Whenever it seems warranted, I will offer recommendations for your consideration.

The Middle Class Advantage

Advocates of parent involvement in the schools such as the author of this paper must face the undeniable fact that parent involvement, as described in the

preceeding pages, can increase the advantages that middle-class parents and children have and work against equity rather than for it. Most of the forms of involvement favor middle-class people. For example: Choice among schools can be made best by parents with broad experience with and knowledge about different kinds of schools. School improvement council activities involve meetings, setting agenda, studies, reports -- all activities which are familiar to well-educated middle-class people. Helping one's child at home with school work is easier for middle class parents who did well in school and are confident and comfortable with academic assignments. Organizing to advocate for a cause requires time, money, and political skill, which are ingredients often more available to middle-class parents than to those who are poor.

If middle-class parents participate most often and most effectively in school affairs, if this participation has a positive effect on their children's learning as the evidence clearly shows it has, then the achievement gap between middle-class children and the children of the poor will be widened rather than narrowed (Tooney, 1985). Equity will not be served.

However, this dismal prospect need not occur. Parent advocates and school reformers who are also concerned about equity can and must intervene to be certain that protections are built into the parent involvement policies and programs, to counterbalance the natural middle-class advantage -- a kind of affirmative action, if you will, to benefit parents who are poor and have the lowest social status and political power. There is ample evidence that poor and minority parents care about their children and have a great deal to contribute to their education. There is ample evidence that poor people can organize effectively and affect public policies. There is ample evidence that poor people can learn how to get information, to "process" it and make wise decisions. Poor and minority parents can develop the competence and confidence needed to participate effectively in any of the forms of participation. But, society must have the political will to invest time, money, and effort needed and to adopt

policies which recognize social class inequities in order to intervene so that parent involvement plans do not, in fact, serve to reproduce rather than reduce existing inequities.

Three kinds of action will help to counterbalance the middle-class advantage.

1. Policies adopted by local officials, state legislatures, Federal lawmakers or executive agency rulemakers must be carefully constructed and monitored from an equity point of view. Examples:
   - Magnet School plans must assure that parent choices do not lead to an imbalance in either racial or ethnic composition of the schools or in their social class composition. Magnet Schools that are overwhelmingly composed of children of minority or poor parents are not likely to be magnetic to white and middle-class parents. Excellent schools that are overwhelmingly middle-class in composition will not distribute their benefits equitably. Hence, parent choice should be constrained by public policy to protect equity interests of children at risk.
   - Co-production policies in local school districts should always include provision for the funds and arrangements needed for "surrogate families" for those children whose families cannot or will not respond to the school's invitation to partnership in learning. Churches, social agencies, and grassroots community organizations can be vehicles for "surrogate" partnerships.
   - Policies for decisionmaking bodies such as School Improvement Councils should always include provision for funds for orientation, training, and offering information to parent participants in ways that will be accessible to poor and working-class

parents as well as to those who are more educationally sophisticated.

2. School administrators and teachers must take the initiative to reach out to "hard to reach" parents and to devise a wide variety of ways for them to participate. This means having appropriately prepared and sensitive school representatives go into homes to meet with families, having some meetings not in the school but in settings less intimidating and more accessible to many parents, using natural and informal settings to reach and talk with parents (churches, markets, social centers), preparing materials in other languages in the case of people whose English proficiency is weak, a scheduling of activities that is attumed to the constituents being sought. But, the key point is that for many parents who are poor and from minority and immigrant groups, the initiative has to come from the school and a diverse and persistent strategy is needed to break down barriers and establish trust.

3. Organizations of and for poor and minority and immigrant communities should take the initiative to monitor school policies from the point of view of equity and the interests of their own constituents and to provide information, assistance, and representation to their constituents to help them deal effectively with school officials, teachers, and other community agencies. The affected communities should find ways to help and empower parents in their communities to take advantage of the opportunities for participation that are already available to them and to press for increased opportunities if they are not already offered. Citywide organizations and universities can offer assistance to grassroots organizations in these kinds of efforts (as in the case of the Schoolwatch Project in New Jersey mentioned earlier in this presentation).

School Resistance to Parent Involvement

There is considerable evidence that the level of parent involvement in U.S. public schools remains quite low, despite the upsurge of interest, the diversity of plans, proposals and models depicted in the paper, and the "climate" of school reform which might be expected to lead to an increase in involvement. A recent study by the System Development Corporation of schools with Federally-funded programs requiring parent involvement discovered that only about 1/3 of these schools had from a moderate to a high level of parent involvement; the others had almost none at all (Keesling, 1980). A study at the Appalachian Educational Laboratory found that the most prevalent techniques for teachers' interacting with parents are "parents phoning teachers when the child is in trouble, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and having parents sign various kinds of messages to be returned to school" (Purnell and Gotts, 1985). Gallop Poll data show a wide discrepancy between the reported willingness of parents to participate in school affairs and the few opportunities they report having for participation. In one poll, only about 20% of the parents reported having any contact at all with their child's school.

It is my assessment that there are some schools (perhaps a third) where there is a substantial amount of parent involvement and a number of exemplary models in each of the categories of parent involvement. But, in most American schools, parent involvement is minimal. It appears the resistance to such involvement, despite the currently fashionable rhetoric about the topic, remains high. Why is this?

Twelve years of study and analysis at the Institute for Responsive Education convince us that the answer to that question lies in the nature of schools as organizations. Schools exhibit certain characteristics just because they are organizations. Four of these characteristics are especially relevant to this discussion: (1) organizations perform their functions through routines or

standard operating procedures which make possible regular and coordinated activity but don't make it easy to respond to crisis or changing external demands (such as, for example, a school effectiveness project or a required citizen participation mechanism); (2) organizations avoid uncertainty and seek regularlized internal and external relationships; (3) organizational procedures and repertoires of activities usually change only incrementally and new activities typically consist of marginal adaptations of existing programs and activities; and (4) organizations will usually allow only a limited search for alternative solutions to problems and generally will choose a course of action that "will do" rather than one which might seem to be optimum but would require higher risk or more change in standard operating procedures. (This is the organizational principle of "satisficing.")

In addition to these general characteristics of all organizations, schools exhibit some rather special characteristics. Some of these special characteristics salient to this discussion of introducing forms of citizen participation in the schools are these:

- The goals of schools as organizations are diffuse, multi-faceted and subject to widely varied interpretations (as contrasted to the post office whose goal is to deliver mail or a manufacturing firm whose goal is to maximize profit)
- The "technology" of achieving goals is fragmented with responsibilities divided among administrators, counselors, classroom teachers, teaching specialists, families, and the students themselves and the connections between a particular activity and a particular desired goal are often uncertain
- The informal norms of school organizations are particularly powerful. The norms and specialized language of teachers as a profession are buttressed by their training and by their professional associations and unions. One such norm is "professional autonomy" in

decisionmaking.

- The formal structure of schools is unique. The various levels of decisionmaking activity -- Federal, state, county, district, school, and classroom -- operate relatively independent of one another with limited coordination and control. As many have pointed out, schools are loosely coupled organizations. This means that mandates from one level to another are never self-enforcing (Huguenin, Zerchykov and Davies, 1979).

If you think about these organizational realities -- both those that apply to all organizations and those that are special to schools -- it is clear that the introduction of almost any form of citizen participation will be difficult. Use a school advisory committee or school improvement council as an example. Such an intervention requires a major deviation from standard operating procedures and introduces a strong element of risk into the organization. The regular flow of decisionmaking is interrupted and there is a risk that the committee will achieve too much power or create conflict. The activity is well beyond the current repertoire of school activities -- with neither teachers or administrators accustomed or trained for it. The introduction of a school council which includes parents or other community residents is a threat to professional autonomy. How the council will fit into the loosely coupled organization of the schools, if at all, is usually unclear.

If you think about the organizational realities it is easy to understand why it has been so difficult to introduce nearly any form of citizen participation in the schools. This organizational framework offers an explanation of the resistance of schools to citizen participation or the ineffectiveness of so many participatory efforts that is far more satisfactory than the usual theories that hold that educators are incompetent, undemocratic, or mean-spirited or that parents are apathetic or selfish and don't want to participate anyway.

If planning which includes citizen participation is to work, the organizational realities must be kept in mind at every step. And, yet, they seldom are.

Time after time policymakers and school administrators and citizen group leaders ignore these basic facts-of-life. Time after time the results are predictable failure and frustrating to all concerned -- policymakers, educators, and citizens.

It is important to say here that directed change in organizations is possible if the planning is good, both technically and politically. Good technical planning will target those factors which are needed to support changes in routines, and norms -- changes, for example, in personnel policies, reward systems, budgets, and information access. Good political planning will recognize that conflicting interests are present and that those seeking change will have to amass sufficient power to bring to the process of bargaining and negotiation which should precede the implementation of any plan.

Mandate or Not?

Many educators and policymakers would argue that the objective of increased parent involvement should be achieved only in an evolutionary way, in which diverse, voluntary activities of teachers and administrators are encouraged by school authorities but not required. They would oppose Federal requirements or state laws which require particular forms of parent involvement (e.g., school improvement councils, parent choice plans), arguing on the grounds of local autonomy. Many of the same educators and policymakers also oppose any prescriptive actions by school boards, arguing for autonomy for individual principals, teachers, and parents.

These are legitimate arguments, of course, but there is clear evidence that mandates are necessary in relationship to parent involvement (whether they be Federal, state or local) if the natural organizational resistance to change and external "elements" is to be overcome. But, a mandate for parent involvement should be seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition to produce positive involvement in its varied forms. The mandate simply provides the framework. Since mandates are not self-enforcing, mechanisms for monitoring, enforcement,

and technical assistance during the implementation of new programs are also clearly needed.

IRE's studies of state mandates for parent and citizen participation indicate that a mandate for parent or citizen participation whether it is a policy of a local school board, or a stahe or Federal law, is likely to work best if:

1. the policies are specific and prescriptive,
2. periodic evaluation and monitoring are required, and
3. support (money, technical assistance, staff time) are provided to assist implementation (Zerchykov, 1980).

Authoritative policies are needed whenever the proposed change (e.g., open enrollment schools, parent participation in decisionmaking, home tutoring activities, individual educational contracts) represents a significant departure for existing organizational norms and procedures, or whenever the new activity requires individual or organizational risks. The wording of the policies is crucial, as the minimum requirements tend to become the maximum performance.

All of this means that if a local school board decides that it wants to increase parent involvement of certain kinds, it should translate this decision into a set of clear and authoritative written policies to be put into place through the usual legislative or collecting bargaining channels. Merely expressing general support for parent involvement or adopting a policy of "good intentions" is not likely to produce change.

In addition to doing good political and technical planning, educators can also take steps to revise teacher and administrator preparation programs to help to create different professional norms that value home-school partnerships and that increase sensitivity to equity issues. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has produced research-grounded guidelines and strategies on training teachers for parent involvement, which could be useful for inservice and staff development programs as well as for preservice training (Williams, 1985).

Choice and Equity

Can parent choice work against equity? Of course it can; it also can contribute to an equalization of both access and achievement. But, this issue is the most complex of those raised in this paper. Discussions about the issue are often confused and perplexing and neither the evidence nor the theory is very helpful. Unhappily, I must confess that I can't offer much definitive help on unsnarling the tangle because my own understandings and clarity on this issue are still limited. Nonetheless, the issue can't be ignored. So, I want simply to raise some questions that should be examined by local and state policymakers and practitioners.

First, it is important to ask who is likely to benefit from any parent choice program. In some communities, where the middle-class or upper middle-class is dominant, it is likely that poor or working class groups will benefit because they, through choice, can obtain for their child a school that is consistent with their values and philosophy, whereas in a unitary system, the dominant elements in the community will impose their vision of a "good school" on them. The converse may also obtain in communities where the middle-class is a political minority. A choice plan such as magnet schools allows this subcommunity to have a school that is satisfying to them without their having to opt for a private school. But, questions remain. The results may provide little integration by social class. For example, the working class parents may overwhelmingly choose a "traditional" model while the middle-class parents opt for individual open, or specialized (e.g., math and science) "magnets."

In cities with student populations that are predominantly black or Hispanic, will magnet schools serve primarily the children of the most upwardly mobile or middle-class members of these communities, thus working to the disadvantage of the others?

Second, it is important to ask what policies will make choice programs less

likely to lead to separation by socio-economic class. Some advocate that magnet schools located in middle-class and affluent neighborhoods are most likely to attract children from both middle and lower socio-economic groups. Others argue that only if all schools are "magnets" and parents have districtwide (or statewide) choice will it be possible to assure "balance" by class and race.

Third, how can schools compensate for the information and experience advantages that middle-class parents have in choice plans? How can the risks for low-income parents be minimized? How can they be informed and helped to feel competent and confident in making a choice among many options?

You will remember that these questions are similar to my perplexities about the class advantages in participation. The same people who are most likely to join interest and advocacy groups, and advisory councils and task forces, are also apt to be the most wiley consumers when choice is offered.

Fourth, what are the most important goals of increasing parent choice -- quelling dissatisfaction, reducing flight from urban districts, encouraging school improvement through competition among schools, encouraging racial or social class integration, making schools better by making schools more distinctive, encouraging a more pluralistic society?

It is clear that no problem of options can serve all these goals. Value choices must be made which are not easy to make in a political system in which there are always conflicting interests.

However, it is clear that increased parent choice is very attractive as a policy option. The test, for those who value equity as a goal, is to devise policies and practices that will not only maximize choice but also protect equity objectives, even if it means that there must be constraints to parent choice and to the diversity which it encounters.

Final Comment

As I said at the outset, there is an opportunity, because of the climate

of school reform for parents, state, and local policymakers, and school people to develop programs which will increase parent involvement in the public schools and rebuild public confidence in those schools. At the local level, I believe that school boards, school administrators, and teachers should take the initiative to develop and implement a comprehensive parent involvement program, involving parents at every step in the process of planning and implementing the plans. Such a comprehensive program should incorporate and integrate elements of all of the forms of involvement -- co-production, decisionmaking, advocacy, and choice. To increase participation, a wide variety of styles and forms of participation must be provided, recognizing different interests, values, time availability, and cultural traditions of parents. The program must also reflect local political and social traditions and the differences between urban, suburban and rural towns and school districts.

The results will be diverse and pluralistic -- not a single program planted in hundreds of sites. School systems aren't McDonald's franchises; diversity is inevitable and desirable -- but, I hope that the comprehensive programs will have a number of elements in common: these have been stated or implied in the preceding pages.

- There will be a clear, authoritative written local policy designed to produce the kinds of parent involvement which local decisionmakers want.
- Equity will be a major priority. Special outreach and incentives, training, and protections will be offered to encourage participation to those in the community who have the least money and social status.
- Opportunity will be provided for parents (or parent surrogates) to contribute directly to improving the educatoin of their children -- in partnership with the school.

- Parents will have an opportjnity to help make decisions at the building level. They will be provided training and help so that their participation will be informed and confident.
- Parents will have maximum freedom to choose among schools and programs which differ in educational style and substance.
- Parents -- usually joining with other citizens -- will organize independently of the schools to advocate for their own interests. Help will be provided by interested allies to poor, immigrant and minority parents.

Increasing parent involvement in local schools can be one of the most important outcomes of the current school reform movement. Such an outcome will, I believe make an important contribution to making school affairs more reflective of democratic values and to making public schools more effective for all children. A thoughtful and vigorous response to the opportunities for increasing parent involvement is one way that equity concerns can be protected and the impact of the reform movement on children at risk made to be more positive.

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